NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

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THE FIRST AMENDMENT IN SCHOOLS

‹ Previous Next ›

The First Amendment protects both students and teachers in schools.

NCAC presents the following collection of materials on the topic of censorship in schools for the use of students, educators, and parents everywhere. This information is not intended as legal advice. If you face a censorship controversy, the resources below can offer guidance. If you need additional assistance, please contact us. We will keep your information confidential until given permission to do otherwise.

NOTE: Guide for Student Protesters available here

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Free Speech, Public Education, and Democracy

The First Amendment and Public Schools

A. The First Amendment

B. The Public Schools

1. School Publications: Student Newspapers and Yearbooks

2. Off-Campus Publications

3. Hair, Dress, and Appearance
4. Gang Symbols and Insignia
5. Off-Campus Speech

Censorship

A. Understanding Censorship
B. Distinguishing Censorship from Selection
C. Consequences of Censorship

How Big a Problem Is Censorship?

A. The Numbers
B. What Kind of Material Is Attacked?
C. What Does "Age Appropriate" Mean?
D. Who Gets Censored?

Roles and Responsibilities

A. School Officials, Boards and State Mandates
B. Principles Governing Selection and Retention of Materials in Schools
C. Complaint Procedures

Censorship Policies

National Education Association (NEA)
The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA)
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
American Library Association (ALA)
National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC)

INTRODUCTION: FREE SPEECH, PUBLIC EDUCATION, AND

DEMOCRACY

Purpose of the Resource Guide: The First Amendment safeguards the rights of every American to speak and think freely. Those rights are central to the educational process and are equally important to educators and students.

For teachers and administrators: The First Amendment protects teachers when they exercise their judgment in accordance with professional standards, making it possible for them to create learning environments that effectively help young people acquire the knowledge and skills needed to become productive, self-sufficient, and contributing members of society.

For students: The First Amendment protects students' ability to think critically and learn how to investigate a wide range of ideas. Students have the right to express their beliefs, just like any other citizen. Protecting students' rights to read, inquire and express themselves is critical to educating informed, engaged citizens.

This guide describes in practical terms what the right to freedom of expression means for students, teachers and administrators in public schools.

Free Speech, Public Education, and Democracy: Our founders considered public schools to be one of the vital institutions of American democracy. But they also knew that education involves more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. Education in a democratic society requires developing citizens who can adapt to changing times, decide important social issues, and effectively judge the performance of public officials. In fulfilling their responsibilities, public schools must educate students on core American values such as fairness, equality, justice, respect for others, and the right to dissent.

Rapid social, political, and technological changes have escalated controversy over what and how schools should teach. References to sexuality, profane language, descriptions of violence and other potentially controversial material have raised questions for generations of parents and educators. Addressing those questions is even more complicated now, when most school communities are made up of individuals with differing backgrounds, cultural traditions, religions, and often languages. With students and parents bringing a range of expectations and needs to the classroom, educators are challenged to balance the educational needs of an entire student body while maintaining respect for the individual rights of each member of the school community.

The First Amendment can help resolve this tension. It defines certain critical rights and responsibilities of participants in the educational process. It both protects the freedom of speech, thought, and inquiry, and requires respect for the right of others to do the same. It

requires schools to resort to "more speech not enforced silence" in seeking to resolve our differences.

THE FIRST AMENDMENT AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

> *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.*
>
> *-First Amendment of the United States Constitution ratified December 15, 1791*

A. The First Amendment

The first provision of the Bill of Rights establishes the rights essential to a democratic society and most cherished by Americans: the right to speak and worship freely, the right to assemble and to petition the government, and the right to a free press. Although most countries purport to guarantee freedom of expression, few provide the level of protection for free speech that the First Amendment guarantees.

The potential for tyranny by the state and abuse of government authority particularly worried framers of the Bill of Rights. Thus, the language of the First Amendment begins by *prohibiting* certain government conduct –i.e., "Congress shall make no law respecting…." Like most of the Constitution, these limitations control only what the *government* may do, and have no effect on private individuals or businesses. Although the Bill of Rights originally limited only the power of the federal government, the Fourteenth Amendment extended the limits imposed by most of the Bill of Rights to state and local governments as well. Since public schools and public libraries are part of state and local government, they must follow the First Amendment as well as many other provisions of the Constitution. However, as this manual will make clear, the First Amendment applies somewhat differently to schools than it does to many other public

institutions.

B. The Public Schools

Public schools are institutions which in some respects most embody the goals of the First Amendment: to create informed citizenry capable of self-governance. As many commentators have observed, a democracy relies on an informed and critical electorate to prosper. As Noah Webster observed in 1785: "It is scarcely possible to reduce an enlightened people to civil or ecclesiastical tyranny." And on the eve of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Benjamin Rush stated that "to conform the principles, morals, and manners of our citizens to our republican form of government, it is absolutely necessary that knowledge of every kind should be disseminated through every part of the United States." Not surprisingly, universal access to free public education has long been viewed as essential to democratic ideals.

America's public schools are the nurseries of democracy. Our representative democracy only works if we protect the "marketplace of ideas." This free exchange facilitates an informed public opinion, which, when transmitted to lawmakers, helps produce laws that reflect the People's will. Schools, however, can sometimes limit students' right to free speech and expression when necessary to achieve legitimate educational goals. As the Supreme Court put it in *Mahanoy Area School District v. B. L. (2021):*

> *Schools have many responsibilities: They must teach basic and advanced skills and information; they must do so for students of different backgrounds and abilities; they must teach students to work independently and in groups; and they must provide a safe environment that promotes learning.*

Given these multiple responsibilities, school officials have wider discretion than other state actors in regulating certain types of speech. For example, they can forbid profane speech on campus (according to *Bethel School District v. Fraser (1986*)) and can punish students for advocating illegal drug use (as in *Morse v. Frederick* (2007)). They can also censor student speech in school publications, such as school newspapers and yearbooks, see *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988). More importantly, schools can censor student speech which is likely to substantially disrupt school operations (*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969)). Therefore, speech is not quite as free inside schools as it is outside.

However, the limits on student speech are quite narrow, and in general, students and teachers do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." *(Tinker v. Des Moines*) See below for examples of how the First Amendment applies to

schools in specific ways.

1. School Publications: School Newspapers and Yearbooks

The Supreme Court has ruled that student journalists have very limited rights when they write for school-sponsored publications such as school newspapers and yearbooks. The school can censor articles for many reasons, including because school officials think that the subject is inappropriate. Some courts have even said that schools can censor editorials because school officials disagree with the views expressed in them.

However, several states have laws which give greater protection to student journalists. A list of those states and links to descriptions of their legislation can be found here.

2. Off-campus Publications: "Underground' Newspapers, Websites, Etc.

Concerns about censorship in "official" school papers may prompt students to publish material produced outside of school, or on websites maintained privately without use of school facilities. Some schools have attempted to censor these publications and suppress off-campus speech they find offensive, disturbing, or unflattering. However, courts have been willing to uphold school censorship of off-campus speech only in unusual circumstances in which the speech has a very high likelihood of substantially disrupting school (such as by publishing answers to tests) or harming particular persons (such as by harassing or threatening them).

Unlike student speech in school, student speech off campus cannot be punished just because it includes profanity, or advocates illegal drug use, or for any reason other than it is very likely to substantially disrupt school. In particular, schools have limited ability to punish or censor off-campus speech about politics or religion. If an independent student publication is distributed on campus, school officials have a bit more power to confiscate or ban it, but only if there is a risk that it will cause substantial disruption of the school.

Student rights can often be limited if students use school resources (such as school computers or the school's internet service) to create or distribute publications. Students can help avoid conflict with school officials by ensuring their unofficial publications are produced and maintained separately from any school course and without school materials or teacher assistance.

Also, it is important for students who use their school's technology to know their school's "Acceptable Use Policy" (AUP). An AUP, which is often found in district guidelines or in a student handbook, sets out the rules and regulations governing student use of school computer networks. Some sample acceptable use policies can be found here, but your school's policy might be different in some ways.

3. Hair, Dress, and Appearance

Since the *Tinker* case in 1969, students, school administrators, and courts have struggled with the boundaries and limits of student dress and grooming requirements. Beginning in the early 1970s, the courts were inundated with cases that confronted the issue, and have found few clear answers. The circuit courts remain split over the control school administrators can exercise with respect to student dress and grooming. The issue often is complicated by gender and guidelines that reinforce rigid binaries. In one case, a school disciplined a boy for wearing an earring, although earrings are permitted under the dress code for girls. Other examples are hair length restrictions for boys but not girls, or dress requirements designed to enforce notions of modesty for girls but not boys. Some public schools have required uniforms, but this has hardly solved the problem, as strict dress codes of this sort are often challenged. In contrast, gender-neutral guidelines about appropriate dress rarely result in challenges.

4. Gang Symbols and Insignia

Since gang members often identify themselves through clothes and insignia, principals have often turned to dress codes in an effort to discourage gang membership and activities. Courts have generally held that these codes are valid.

5. Off-Campus Speech

In recent years, there s been an increasing number of cases involving off-campus student speech which has effects on-campus. Often, that speech takes place on social media. Schools cannot punish students for profane speech that takes place off-campus (except during a field trip, which courts consider part of the school). Nor can they punish students for off-campus speech which advocates illegal drug use. However, schools can sometimes punish students for off-campus speech which has a strong chance of coming on campus and disrupting school, such as racist speech when the school has a history of racial conflict. And, schools can of course punish students for off-campus speech that harasses students or school employees, or which threatens violence against the school.

CENSORSHIP

A. Understanding Censorship

Censorship is the suppression of speech or other expression that the censor (a person or institution with the power to suppress speech) does not like.

Parents and community groups often try to remove school materials that discuss sexuality, religion, race, or ethnicity–whether directly or indirectly. For example, some people object to the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution in science classes because it conflicts with their own religious views. Others think schools should not allow discussion about sexual orientation or gender identities, and other people call for eliminating *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from the English curriculum because they think it is racist.

As these examples show, demands for censorship originate across the entire spectrum of religious, ideological, and political opinion.

When people ask schools to censor materials, schools must balance their First Amendment duties against other concerns, such as maintaining the integrity of the educational program, meeting state education requirements, respecting the judgments of professional staff, and addressing deeply held beliefs in students and members of the community. In dealing with challenges to materials, educators are on the strongest ground if they are mindful of two fundamental principles that the Supreme Court has repeatedly recognized: 1) schools have broad power to decide what and how to teach, as long as their decisions are based on sound educational principles and are aimed at improving student learning; and 2) the decisions that are most vulnerable to legal challenge are those that are motivated by hostility to an unpopular or controversial idea, or by the desire to force acceptance of a particular viewpoint.

Pursuant to these principles, when someone claims in a lawsuit that a school's actions violate the First Amendment, courts generally defer to the professional judgments of educators. That means that courts will often uphold a decision to remove a book or to discipline a teacher, if the decision serves legitimate educational objectives, including administrative efficiency. However, it is equally true that schools which *reject* demands for censorship are on equally strong or stronger grounds. As the Supreme Court stated in its 2021 *Mahanoy* decision, schools have a strong interest in protecting unpopular expression, in exposing students to a wide range of views, and in giving students the opportunity to discuss those views.

Therefore, it is extremely unlikely that a school official who relied on these principles and refused to accede to pressures to censor something with educational value would ever be

ordered by a court of law to do so.

B. Distinguishing Censorship from Selection

Schools make decisions all the time about which books and materials to include in or exclude from the curriculum. Hence, they are not violating the First Amendment every time they cross a book off a reading list. However, they could be acting unconstitutionally if they decide to remove a book solely because of hostility to the ideas it contains.

For example, administrators and faculty might agree to take discussion of evolution out of the second grade curriculum because the students lack sufficient background to understand it, and decide to introduce it in the fourth grade instead. As long as they are not motivated by hostility to the idea of teaching about evolution, this would not ordinarily be problematic. The choice to include the material in the fourth grade curriculum tends to demonstrate this was a pedagogical judgment, not an act of censorship.

However, not every situation is that simple. For example, objections to material dealing with sexuality or sexual orientation commonly surface in elementary schools and middle schools when critics claim that such material is not "age appropriate" for those students. Often, it becomes clear that their concern is not that students will not understand the material, but that they simply do not want the students to have access to that type of information. If professional educators can show a legitimate pedagogical rationale for maintaining such material in the curriculum, it is unlikely that an effort to remove it will be successful.

Moreover, while individual parents have considerable control over their own child's education and can request their child be given a different book, they have no right to impose their preferences on other students and their families.

C. Consequences of Censorship

Censorship based on individual sensitivities and concerns restricts the world of knowledge available to students. Based on personal views, some parents wish to eliminate material depicting violence, others object to references to sexuality, others to speech about racial issues or images that offend them. Some parents oppose having their children exposed to fiction that doesn't have a happy ending, teach a moral lesson, or provide positive role models. If these and other individual preferences were legitimate criteria for censoring materials used in school, the curriculum would narrow to including only the least controversial and probably least relevant and interesting material. It would hardly address students' real concerns, satisfy their curiosity, or prepare them for life.

Censorship also harms teachers. By limiting resources and flexibility, censorship hampers a

teacher's ability to explore all possible avenues to motivate and "reach" students. By curtailing ideas that can be discussed in class, censorship takes creativity and vitality out of the art of teaching. Instruction is reduced to bland, formulaic, pre-approved exercises carried out in an environment that discourages the give-and-take that can spark a student's enthusiasm for learning. To maintain spontaneity in the classroom setting, teachers need latitude to respond to unanticipated questions and discussion, and the freedom to draw on their professional judgment and expertise, without fear of consequences if someone objects, disagrees, or takes offense.

School censorship is particularly harmful because it prevents young people with inquiring minds from exploring the world, seeking truth and reason, stretching their intellectual capacities, and becoming critical thinkers. When the classroom environment is not open and inviting, honest exchange of views is replaced by guarded discourse, and teachers lose the ability to reach and guide their students effectively.

HOW BIG A PROBLEM IS CENSORSHIP?

A. The Numbers

The American Library Association (ALA), which tracks and reports censorship incidents, reports that there are hundreds of challenges in schools and public libraries every year. ALA estimates that roughly four or five times as many go unreported.

B. What Kind of Material Is Attacked?

ALA offers an instructive analysis of the motivation behind most censorship incidents:

> *The term censor often evokes the mental picture of an irrational, belligerent individual. Such a picture, however, is misleading. In most cases, the one to bring a complaint to the library is a concerned parent or a citizen sincerely interested in the future well-being of the community. Although complainants may not have a broad*

> *knowledge of literature or of the principles of freedom of expression, their motives in questioning a book or other library material are seldom unusual. Any number of reasons are given for recommending that certain material be removed from the library. Complainants may believe that the materials will corrupt children and adolescents, offend the sensitive or unwary reader, or undermine basic values and beliefs. Sometimes, because of these reasons, they may argue that the materials are of no interest or value to the community.*

While demands for censorship can come from almost anyone and involve any topic or form of expression, most incidents involve concerns about sexual content–specifically LGBTQ+ content–religion, profanity, or racial slurs. Many incidents involve only one complaint, but nonetheless trigger a review process that can become contentious. Parents who support free expression do not step forward to participate in public discussions as frequently as those seeking to remove materials, leaving school officials and teachers relatively isolated. It is then their task to assess the pedagogical value of the materials carefully. If they give in to viewpoint-based demands, they can undermine educational objectives, as well as encourage more challenges.

C. What Does "Age Appropriate" Mean?

One of the most common demands for censorship involves the claim that certain school materials are not "age appropriate."

Educators generally use the term "age appropriate" when they mean the point at which children have sufficient life experience and cognitive skills to comprehend certain material. For example, educators may decide that detailed scientific information about human reproduction may not be age-appropriate for six-year-olds but would be understood by 12-year-olds who have been introduced to basic biology.

However, when censors complain that a book is not "appropriate," they often mean that students shouldn't be exposed to the material for reasons of personal ideology or belief. The objection usually occurs when the material concerns sexuality and often reflects a fear that exposure to it will undermine moral or religious values. Acceding to the pressure to censor in this situation can be tantamount to endorsing one moral or religious view over another.

Responding to questions about age appropriateness, the National Council of Teachers of English noted that "materials should be suited to maturity level of the students," and that it is important to "weigh the value of the material as a whole, particularly its relevance to educational objectives, against the likelihood of a negative impact on the students… That likelihood is lessened by the exposure the typical student has had to the controversial subject."

D. Who Gets Censored?

The books targeted by censors include both popular and classic titles, affecting choices made by almost every age group. The ALA's list of most challenged books in 2020 includes:

- *George* by Alex Gino
- *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds
- *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely
- *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie
- *Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story About Racial Injustice* by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard, illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
- *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck
- *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison
- *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas

Some of these titles appear on the ALA's list of most challenged works year after year. For example, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* has made the list eight times since 2010; *George* has been on the list every year since 2016, and has been the most challenged book each of the last three years. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Of Mice and Men,* and *The Bluest Eye* have appeared periodically on the list for two decades or more.

E. The Chilling Effect

Censorship often leads directly to self-censorship. It occurs every day. Sometimes it's obvious even if no one uses the "c" word. Sometimes it is more insidious (and less justified)–for example, when a teacher decides not to use a particular story or book or a librarian doesn't order a particular magazine because of fears about possible complaints. It is impossible to quantify the damage that self-censorship does to education. But it is common enough to have its own name: "the chilling effect." This is the idea that restricting access to information based on particular viewpoints will discourage the use of potentially controversial (or even complicated) material in the future, that teachers, for example, will avoid teaching a book just because they don't want to risk the disruption a formal complaint would cause, even if they truly believe that book would be an excellent educational choice.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: PROMOTING FIRST AMENDMENT VALUES AT SCHOOL

A. School Officials, Boards, and State Mandates

The school board's role is to define an educational philosophy that serves the needs of all its students and reflects community goals. In this process, most districts see a role for parents and other community members. Educational advisory boards can also assist educators in discerning the needs and perspectives of the community. Open school board meetings can keep the public informed about the school district's educational philosophy and goals, encourage comments, questions and participation, and increase community support for the schools. Although public debate about the educational system provides opportunities for community input and can assist educators in developing materials to meet students' needs and concerns, actual curriculum development and selection are tasks uniquely suited to the skills and training of professional educators. Hence, school boards should defer to the judgment of review committees composed of educators when making decisions about curricular materials.

While curriculum development relies heavily on the professional expertise of trained educators, it is also controlled by state education law and policy. Educators' choices are influenced by factors such as competency standards, graduation requirements, standardized testing, and other educational decisions made at the state level.

B. Principles Governing Selection and Retention of Materials in Schools

School officials have the constitutional duty to ensure that curriculum development and selection decisions are made without attempting to advance any particular political or religious viewpoint. School districts otherwise have broad discretion when selecting classroom instructional materials.

In contrast, policies governing school libraries and classroom resource materials place a priority on including a wider range of materials. The ALA Library Bill of Rights (1948) recognizes the library's essential role in providing resources to serve the "interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community." With minor modifications, these principles also apply in the school setting.

The considerations specifically relevant to school libraries are identified by National School Board Association guidelines:

- To provide materials that will enrich and support the school's curricula;
- To provide materials that will stimulate knowledge, growth, literary appreciation, aesthetic values, ethical standards, and leisure-time reading;
- To provide information to help students make intelligent judgments;
- To provide information on opposing sides of controversial issues so that students may develop the practice of critical reading and thinking; and
- To provide materials representative of the many religious, ethnic, and cultural groups that have contributed to the American heritage.

The ALA believes that library materials "should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval."

C. Complaint Procedures

All school districts should adopt formal policies and procedures for responding to complaints about materials. Formal policies clarify how the complaint process works; help faculty, staff, and administration fulfill their legal obligations; let parents and students know what criteria are used for removing materials and how they are applied; ensure that all voices are heard and considered; and protect the academic freedom of teachers.

When materials are challenged, schools with a well-articulated process for handling complaints are more likely to resist viewpoint-based censorship pressures than districts without one. Having a policy in place, and following it scrupulously, ensures that complainants will receive due process, and that challenged materials will be judged on their educational merits rather than personal opinions. It is important for teachers and administrators to be familiar with these policies and understand their importance. Armed with this knowledge, school officials are less likely to submit to pressure or react with unilateral decisions to remove books.

The most effective complaint procedures provide that:

- Complaints must be made in writing.
- Complainants should identify themselves both by name/address and by their interest in the material (i.e., as a parent, student, religious leader, etc.).
- Complainants must have read/seen the entire work objected to.
- The complaint must be specific about the reasons for the objection.
- Complaints should request a specific remedy (i.e., an alternative assignment for a student, or removal/exclusion affecting the entire school community).
- Complaints, standing alone, will not be considered grounds for disciplining teachers or librarians.
- Complaints are adjudicated by a diverse committee of stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

- Challenged materials remain in the curriculum/library until the challenge is adjudicated and all appeals are completed.

A list of model policies is available here.

It is advisable for policies to contain a statement supporting intellectual and academic freedom, and an explanation of the importance of giving students access to a wide variety of material and information, some of which may be considered controversial. The policy should also specify that viewpoint-based concerns – disagreement with a specific idea or message, and personal objections to materials on religious, political, or social grounds – do not justify removal of a book or other material. Such concerns may, however, justify a parent's request that his or her child be assigned alternate material. These principles, if uniformly and consistently implemented, protect students' right to learn. They also make it possible for educators to exercise their professional judgment, and help insulate them and the school district from legal challenge and community pressure.

In order to prepare for challenges, educators should do all of the following:

- School administrators and teachers should work together to develop an understanding about how they will respond if material is challenged, recognizing that it is impossible to predict what may be challenged.
- Educators should have a rationale for the materials they use, especially when they think some of it is potentially controversial.
- In approaching material that may be controversial, keep parents advised about what material students are using and why it has been selected.
- Encourage parents with questions about curricular materials to address them to their child's teacher, and encourage teachers to be willing and available to discuss concerns with parents.
- Schedule regular meetings for parents. In one innovative program in South Carolina, librarian Pat Scales invited parents to the library once a month, without students, to discuss contemporary young adult books that their children might be reading, to understand how the books helped their children grow intellectually and emotionally, and to encourage parents to use the discussion of books to spark conversation with their children. As a result, she never had a censorship problem, and she became a resource for parents seeking books to help their children address troublesome issues. (Pat Scales' book, *Teaching Banned Books* (ALA, 2001) describes this program in detail.)
- Involve members of the community in any debate over challenged materials. Broadening the discussion usually reveals that only a small number of people object to the same book at the same time.
- Support the value of intellectual and academic freedom. Conscientious teachers who are

caught in a censorship dispute deserve support from their colleagues and the community. Otherwise, teachers will stick to the tried and true or the bland and unobjectionable.

For more advice on how teachers can safeguard their selection of instructional materials from successful challenges, see NCAC resources for teachers and administrators here.

CENSORSHIP POLICIES

Major Educational Organizations Take a Stand for the First Amendment

Many national and international organizations concerned with elementary and secondary education have established guidelines on censorship issues. While each organization addresses censorship a little differently, each is committed to free speech and recognizes the dangers and hardships imposed by censorship. The organizations couple their concern for free speech with a concern for balancing the rights of students, teachers, and parents. Many place heavy emphasis on the importance of establishing policies for selecting classroom materials and procedures for addressing complaints. The following summarizes the censorship and material selection policies adopted by leading educational organizations.

National Education Association (NEA)

The NEA is America's oldest and largest organization committed to advancing the cause of public education. Its 2.5 million members work at every level of education. Elected representatives from across the country are responsible for setting policy, which includes resolutions on selecting and developing education materials and teaching techniques. The resolutions embody NEA's belief that democratic values are best transmitted free from censorship and deplore "pre-publishing censorship, book burning crusades, and attempts to ban books from the … curriculum." The NEA encourages its members to be involved in developing textbooks and materials and to seek the removal of laws and regulations that restrict selection of diverse materials.

The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA)

An 80,000-member organization devoted to improving the teaching and learning of English and the language arts, the NCTE offers support, advice, and resources to teachers and schools faced with challenges to teaching materials or methods. The NCTE has developed a *Statement on Censorship and Professional Guidelines* recognizing that English and language arts teachers face daily decisions about teaching materials and methods.

The IRA has 90,000 members worldwide, working in a variety of educational capacities. Its goal is to promote high levels of literacy by improving the quality of reading instruction and encouraging reading as a lifetime habit. The IRA supports "freedom of speech, thought, and inquiry as guaranteed by the First Amendment."

The NCTE and IRA have issued a joint statement on intellectual freedom:

> *all students in public school classrooms have the right to materials and educational experiences that promote open inquiry, critical thinking, diversity in thought and expression, and respect for others.*

Their mutual policy sets out four principles aimed at translating the ideals of the First Amendment into classroom reality: (1) to actively support intellectual freedom; (2) to foster democratic values, critical thinking, and open inquiry; (3) to prepare for challenges with clearly defined procedures; and (4) to ensure educational communities are free to select and review classroom curricula to meet student needs.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)

The ASCD is an international organization of professional educators committed to excellence in education. Its mission is to "forge covenants in teaching and learning for the success of all learners." The ASCD recognizes the importance of balancing the rights and needs of students, teachers, and parents with freedom of expression:

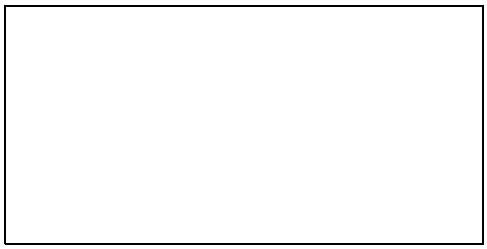
> *When challenges arise, school officials should bear in mind that education is governed by the public . . . [Educators] should recognize the value of citizen participation and respect the right of parents to shape their children's schooling. At the same time, educators should insist that, as in other fields, professional judgment must not be completely subservient to the popular will. Educators' primary allegiance must be to the integrity of knowledge and the welfare of students.*

The ASCD stresses the importance of establishing complaint procedures and affirms that materials are never to be restricted for the purpose of suppressing ideas.

American Library Association (ALA)

The ALA, "the voice of America's libraries," is dedicated to providing leadership for the "development, promotion and improvement of library and information services…in order to enhance learning and access to information for all." The ALA has a widely emulated Bill of Rights affirming all libraries as forums for information and ideas. The ALA's policies stipulate that libraries should provide materials from all points of view; challenge censorship; cooperate with free speech groups; grant access to all regardless of origin, age, background, or views; and provide exhibit space on an equitable basis. Drawing on the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights, the ALA emphasizes the importance of free speech: "We know that censorship, ignorance, and limitations on the free flow of information are the tools of tyranny and oppression. We believe that ideas and information topple the walls of hate and fear and build bridges of cooperation and understanding far more effectively than weapons and armies."

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)



Dedicated to supporting elementary and middle-level principals and other education leaders in their commitment for all children, NAESP sets policy on curriculum and instruction. In its statement on censorship and academic freedom, "NAESP affirms the right of the

student and teacher to use a wide variety of curriculum and literary materials and to explore divergent points of view." NAESP also emphasizes the importance of establishing procedures to address selection of materials and challenges to selections. These procedures are to be carried out "professionally and equitably," according to established professional criteria and the values and needs of the community.

National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC)

Founded in 1974, NCAC is an alliance of over 50 national non-profit organizations–including literary, artistic, religious, educational, professional, labor, and civil liberties group–united in their support of freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression. NCAC works with teachers, educators, writers, artists, and others around the country dealing with censorship debates in their own communities; it educates its members and the public at large about the dangers of censorship and how to oppose them; and it advances policies that promote and protect freedom of expression and democratic values. For specific advice on strengthening your book selection procedures and resisting censorship, submit a Censorship Report to NCAC at ncac.org/report-censorship.

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The First Amendment in Schools: Introduction
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